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"As we continue to debate this issue, I hope Democrats in Congress will realize what the average American already understands: We cannot address illegal immigration without first addressing border security."

- Congressman Joe
Wilson
Representing South
Carolina's 2nd District

Focusing on illegal immigration



By JOE WILSON
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Guest columnist

Wednesday at Brookland Baptist Church in West Columbia, I will hold the first of three August town hall meetings to discuss one of the greatest potential threats facing the United States: illegal immigration.

Illegal immigration is not a problem only in California, New York or Texas; it is a problem in South Carolina, too. According to estimates released by the Pew Hispanic Center earlier this year, as of March 2005, there were as many as 75,000 illegal aliens living in South Carolina. The burden to taxpayers and the drain on social services is indisputable. A 2004 study by the Center for Immigration Studies found that the net cost of illegal households to the federal government was more than \$10 billion per year. This says nothing of state and local costs to provide education, health benefits and welfare.

But you don't need me to tell you all of this. Illegal immigration is debated daily around office water coolers and family dinner tables. Republicans in Congress understand the importance of effectively addressing this issue and are working to craft common-sense measures to secure our borders and increase our national security.

Last December, House Republicans passed a strong border security bill to do just that. Our bill would add 700 miles of fencing along the most vulnerable areas of our Southern border, put an end to the practice of "catch and release," incorporate stringent measures for verifying and complying with employee eligibility and increase penalties for employers who knowingly hire illegal aliens.

In contrast, the Harry Reid-Ted Kennedy Senate bill, which is more than 800 pages long and contains provisions that have not yet been analyzed, grants Social Security benefits to illegal aliens for the time they worked in the United States illegally, allows illegal aliens to receive in-state tuition at local colleges and universities, prohibits local law enforcement from detaining illegal aliens for civil violations and requires that the United States consult with Mexico before constructing a border fence.

We are at a crossroads today in the United States. We can choose to effectively address this growing epidemic, or we can turn a blind eye to the problem. As House and Senate Republicans seek to enact meaningful legislation, we are bringing our case to you. Through various field hearings and town hall meetings, we will be seeking your input on this critical issue.

I hope you will join me for one of the town hall meetings I am hosting during the next several days. I will be traveling throughout the 2nd Congressional District to hear your concerns and share my views.

I recently participated in a field hearing in Plano, Texas, where we examined how employers are implementing employee verification systems. Of the 200 people who attended, the response was overwhelming: Americans want secure borders.

As we continue to debate this issue, I hope Democrats in Congress will realize what the average American already understands: We cannot address illegal immigration without first addressing border security.

Mr. Wilson represents the 2nd District in the U.S. House.

www.gop.gov/bordersecurity

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